

MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Community Services
The Hon. Linda Burney MP



Sunday, 3 May 2009

SAFE SEXTING: NO SUCH THING

The NSW Government today announced that it would start an education campaign to warn children about the dangers of sexting and posting images of themselves on the internet.

Minister for Community Services Linda Burney today unveiled a new fact sheet for schools, parents and young people to warn about the lifetime consequences of this growing practice.

Sexting involves sending suggestive or sexual images through mobile phones that can then be posted on the internet or forwarded to other people.

"More and more parents are telling me how worried they are about their children making a silly mistake that can affect them for the rest of their lives," Ms Burney said.

"Reports from concerned adults are becoming more frequent. There is an urgent need for us to address this issue.

"I urge parents to warn their children about the consequences of sexting.

"It may be a difficult conversation but I think every parent will agree it is a very important one."

The Department of Community Services has received reports of girls as young as 13 sending sexually explicit images to their boyfriends' mobiles, which are then passed on to other friends.
(*case studies attached*)

"Everyone needs to understand that first and foremost, it is illegal to take sexual photos of children and young people and it is also an offence to pass them on."

"Young people often don't think about the consequences of their actions. What they think is an innocent joke or harmless flirting can be very damaging if it falls into the wrong hands.

"Once the photo is sent, it's just a push of the button to forward it or load it on to the internet. It is frightening to think that once these images are online or on a phone, anyone anywhere in the world can access them.

"It is then impossible to retrieve and delete them. They are there forever and can damage future career prospects or relationships."

For the same reasons, Ms Burney said that parents should also warn their children about their vulnerability when uploading photos and information onto online social network websites such as Facebook and MySpace.

"Anyone can gain access to their page. An easy lesson for children to learn is – would you want me to see this picture of you?"

A dangerous consequence is the risk of public humiliation, harassment or even sexual assault.

"I urge young people to respect each other – if they receive any inappropriate images of their friends or even people they don't know, do not pass them on.

"I encourage parents wanting more advice about sexting to contact Parent Line, the NSW Government-funded 24-hr parenting advice line, on 1300 1300 52. The line is staffed by highly experienced and trained counsellors," Ms Burney said.

The Minister for Education and Training Verity Firth said a fact sheet for students, parents, teachers and principals will be distributed to NSW public schools on 4 May, 2009.

"I encourage parents to visit the Education Department's website on technology to learn more about how technology is used in their child's life," Ms Firth said.

The Education Department's website on technology is
www.schools.nsw.edu.au/news/technology/index.php

For more advice of parenting and sexting, visit the Department of Community Services website
www.community.nsw.gov.au

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

- Warn your children about the consequences of sexting.
- Remind children to think before they act.
- Tell children that sending or possessing child pornography is illegal.
- Warn them about sexual predators.
- Learn how to use and monitor their children's mobile phones.
- Check photo galleries on their children's Facebook and MySpace accounts.
- Give your children clear rules on what they can and can't do with the mobile phone.

CASE STUDIES FROM THE HELPLINE:

NOTE: Names have been changed to protect privacy.

Case study 1

When Karen, aged 13, and David were dating, David pressured Karen into taking a photo of herself naked and sending it to him on his mobile phone.

A year later when they were no longer a couple, David sent photos of Karen to other students at their school, as well as people outside of the school.

Case study 2

Jason, a student at a high school, borrowed his friend Sylvia's phone and found a picture on the screen saver of a teenager performing a sexual act.

The police were called in to investigate and consider pornography charges.

Case study 3

Colin, the father of three teenage daughters, was shocked when a workmate showed him footage on a mobile phone of a 15-year-old girl having sex with two men. He could clearly see the girl's face.

He said he would be horrified to think that pictures of his daughters might be shown around by strangers.